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V CORPS' 76TH ARMY BAND SHARES EXPERIENCES, MUSIC AT BATTLE OF THE BULGE COMMEMORATIONS

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MALMEDY, Belgium — Soldiers from V Corps' 76th Army Band spread Christmas cheer in Luxembourg and Belgium December 13-18 as they played to residents and veterans and dignitaries who came to the region from across the globe for events commemorating the 60th anniversary of the World War II Battle of the Bulge.

The band played in honor of the Soldiers who fought to a very different beat at the Bulge. The thump of constant bombing and whirring of bullets filled the air here six decades ago this week.

Malmedy is a particularly moving spot for the band to honor its Army ancestors.



STAFF SGT MANUEL TORRES-CORTES
V Corps' 76th Army Band performs in Malmedy, Belgium for an audience of local residents, as well as dignitaries and veterans from around the world, during commemorations of the 60th anniversary of the World War II Battle of the Bulge.

The Army's Battery B, 285th Field Artillery Observation Battalion, came from the Netherlands to Luxembourg on Dec. 16, 1944. The battery passed through Malmedy

a day later before the German offensive stopped the battalion's march later that day. The battery was forced to surrender to the enemy.

In what a U.S. congressional resolution has called "the worst atrocity involving Americans in the European theater during World War II," more than 80 unarmed Soldiers from the battery were killed after surrendering. Others managed to escape before and during the surrender and shooting. According to Army mortuary affairs reports, a few were seriously wounded, but "played dead" and escaped later, but the recovery of the fallen soldiers' remains did not begin until January 13, 1945, when U.S. units recaptured the area.

Playing in the shadow of that somber history, band members said, made their appearance here more personal than just another job.

In addition to Malmedy, the band performed at other historic locations such as Florenville, Arlon, LaRoche and Bastogne, Belgium, as well as Luxembourg city, Luxembourg.

Spc. Amanda R. Davis, who plays the clarinet and bass clarinet for the 76th, said she was excited and proud that she had the opportunity to perform at the Bulge commemorations, for both historical and personal reasons.

"Playing for the vets here is important and special to me, because my grandfather was a veteran. So it's an honor to talk with the vets and play for the people they fought for," said Davis. "It makes this trip much more personal to me."

The Soldiers kept the crowd's attention by inviting them to sing along as they performed a variety of familiar holiday tunes, such as "The Christmas Song" and "Feliz Navidad."

Helping to push off the December chill, bassoon player Sgt. Ariel N. Miller warmed the crowd with her rendition of Eartha Kitt's, "Santa baby." As Miller's soft voice echoed through the hall, claps and cheers kept time with her performance.

"It an honor to be asked to come here and share something that I love to do. It is a unique experience and a wonderful opportunity," said Miller. "It helps put things in perspective, meeting the veterans. Their deployment here was so different from mine in Iraq last year, but we share so many similar experiences."

Despite the cold and a steady snowfall on the final day of their memorial "gig," the band played continually during events in the area.

Along the way they even found some living World War II musical history. One of the veterans they encountered played with the fabled Glenn Miller Band before being drafted and had worked to bring Miller's music to troops overseas.

Staff Sgt. Eric H. Burger, who both sings for the band and serves as its operations and training NCO, called meeting a colleague of Miller's a high point of the 76th's tour of Bulge sites. Miller, who was killed in a plane crash in the



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Staff Sgt. Eric Burger, who serves as both vocalist and operations and training NCO for V Corps' 76th Army Band, sings to residents, veterans and dignitaries at a Malmedy, Belgium commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the World War II Battle of the Bulge.

English Channel en route to performing for Soldiers fighting at the Bulge, is an icon to military bandsmen, Burger said.

"To military bandsmen, his dedication and sacrifice to bring music to the troops is something we all try to do," the staff sergeant said.

Burger added that entire week's events were something for the band members to cherish and remember.

"This trip was very successful and the Soldiers really enjoyed themselves, and I am sure that this will be one of the most memorable experiences in their career," he said.

"It was very cold and the conditions were physically challenging, especially for the musicians. But when they knew they had the chance to play for the veterans, Americans and everyone all around the world (who came) to commemorate this event, they didn't want to quit. They brushed the snow off on their music sheets and continued to play."

